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ABSTRACT

With relatively few exceptions, most recent needs assessment questionnaires have dealt solely with either (1) identifying the level of interest that prospective participants have for attending an inservice program centered about a particular topic, or (2) identifying which among a number of topics generates the most enthusiasm. That is, most needs assessments are topic-oriented; consequently, little beyond the topic of concern is ascertained and decisions as to all other details of the program are made on the basis of distinctly limited knowledge as to what participants will find most attractive and/or educationally profitable. Under the belief that the scope of needs assessments should be widened, the questionnaire appearing in Appendix A was constructed. The results of the survey are not presented so much to guide action as to portray the nature, scope, and usefulness of information that can be made available to the designer of an inservice program. The questionnaire deals with the following areas: the climate of receptivity for programs, factors that have hindered participation in programs, the scheduling of programs, the program site, the kinds of learning activities included, the topic, and the rewards and motivations for attendance. (Author/IRT)

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TOPIC: Inservice Staff Development Programs for School Principals:
Needs Assessments and Inservice Programs

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Summary of Remarks:

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I. Needs Assessments and Inservice Programs

Current realities and emergent forces such as the press for accountability, the decrease in professional mobility, the complexity of educational issues, and the rapid expansion of the educational administration knowledge base highlight the need for inservice professional development programs for school administrators. This need has not gone unnoticed: schools, universities, and professional agencies expend increasingly more time and energy upon this phase of the preparation of educational administrators. In spite of the diversity and number of inservice programs and although inservice education falls outside the boundary of traditional schooling, a great deal of homogeneity exists among most inservice programs. With the exception of their topics, most inservice programs fall into a handful of distinct categories--workshops, seminars, or conferences--and exhibit few differences in procedure. This observation seemingly supports the notion that all individuals or groups of individuals have the same preferred style of learning and that this style is known--a notion unsupported by research.

On the other hand, research to date offers precious little information concerning the comparative effectiveness of different instructional procedures or a strategy for matching an individual's preferred style of learning to a particular instructional procedure. Within institutions of learning, the increasingly prevalent response to this dilemma has been the provision of numerous instructional options from which the learner is permitted to select according to her/his preference--a response which, awaiting the production of a more definitive knowledge base, seems quite

appropriate. Unfortunately, the transient nature and the relatively small target population of most inservice programs makes such a response unrealistic for inservice programs; but the spirit of this response is perhaps more readily attainable to the designer of an inservice program. That is, because most inservice programs are designed for a specific and relatively small group of learners, the designer should be able to tailor a program to its intended participants by determining their preferences and acting in accordance. Unfortunately, these preferences are infrequently collected; and this failure has been promoted by the adoption of a rather narrow conception of the purpose of needs assessments, typically the first step in the design of an instructional system.

With relatively few exceptions, most recent needs assessment questionnaires have dealt solely with either (a) identifying the level of interest which prospective participants have for attending an inservice program centered about a particular topic, or (b) identifying which among a number of topics generates the most enthusiasm for holding a program. That is, most needs assessments are topic-oriented; consequently, little beyond the topic of concern is ascertained and decisions as to all other details of the program are made on the basis of distinctly limited knowledge as to what participants will find most attractive and/or educationally profitable. For example, although a program's intended participants may have a great desire to learn more concerning the chosen topic, they may have little desire to attend the type of program which has been structured and/or the program may not be totally effective in instructing its participants.

A needs assessment attempts to deliver information which assists the decision-making involved in designing an instructional system. Therefore, needs assessment should gather the preferences of prospective participants concerning all aspects of an inservice program which are modifiable in light of these preferences. In addition to affixing a program's topic, such matters as the location of the program site, the instructional mode, the reward offered for participation, and the duration of the program are relevant concerns of a needs assessment.

However, learner preference should not furnish the sole basis for the structure of an inservice program. As in all complex situations, a number of equally important concerns must be balanced. The goal of an instructional system is the maximum promotion of learning; learner preferences for an instructional system are a valid basis for action only in those instances when they assist in the attainment of this goal. Since it is undoubtedly true that enjoying the instructional process promotes more effective learning, given the choice between incorporating either of two nearly equivalent instructional options, the one which is more preferred by the intended learner should be implemented.

Under the belief that the scope of needs assessments should be widened, the questionnaire appearing in Appendix A was constructed. As a pilot-study for a much larger and as yet uncompleted investigation, the questionnaire was administered to sixty principals. Due to the purpose of this trial study, the results of the survey are not generalizable beyond the actual respondents sampled. The results of the survey are not presented so much to guide action as to portray the nature, scope, and usefulness of information which can be made available to the designer of an

inservice program if an attempt is made to gather this information. Following the presentation of select results, a model inservice program is designed in compliance to the preferences of these sixty principals taken as a learner group.

II. The Expanded Needs Assessment Survey: A Pilot-Study

A. The Climate of Receptivity for Inservice Programs

Before an inservice program is designed and offered, the interest level of prospective participants should be determined. If they are not interested, then efforts may be better expended on learning why this condition exists and altering the climate of receptivity. Although one could hope that through offering an "excellent" inservice program this climate may change, it must be remembered that for this to occur the program must be excellent in the eyes of the participants and they may enter the program "with chips on their shoulders."

With regard to the pilot-study, 37% of the principals declared that they had high interest in attending inservice programs while 54% stated they had medium interest. Only 9% declared low interest and none were not interested at all. This level of interest is somewhat substantiated by the fact that 84% of the principals had attended at least one inservice program during the last year and that 44% had attended three or more programs during the same period. Thus, approximately 91% of the sixty principals are receptive to attending an inservice program. The actual pool of possible participants for a particular inservice program, of course,

depends upon the topic and design of the particular program.

Along the same lines, 79% of the respondents said they were willing to devote at least three days each year to inservice programs; nearly half were willing to devote between 3 and 5 days. However, 74% of the principals spent at least three days in inservice programs last year, but 54% said they did not attend as many programs as they wanted. Moreover, 71% of the principals indicated that within the last two years there was a particular inservice program which they would have liked to attend but could not or did not attend. Given this relatively high level of interest in attending inservice programs, it is pertinent to investigate what factors precluded more widespread participation.

B. Factors Which Have Hindered Participation in Inservice Programs

Of the 54% of principals who stated that they did not attend as many inservice programs as they would have liked to attend last year, 34% blamed this occurrence on their inability to locate a program which was scheduled at times they could attend. Thirty-three percent felt that their job responsibilities would not permit any additional absences while another 7% could not obtain the necessary release time. Opposed to these issues which seem to cluster about a time-scheduling factor, 11% of the respondents indicated a willingness to attend additional programs but could not locate a program of interest.

These findings were substantiated by the responses of the 39 principals (71%) who failed to attend a particular inservice program of

interest. Sixty-seven percent of these principals did not attend the program because it was scheduled at a time when their job responsibilities required their continuous attention. However, 14% of the respondents did not learn of the program until it was too late to make the necessary arrangements, while an additional 11% could not secure the necessary funds for travel and/or fees.

Thus, according to the sixty principals, the scheduling of inservice programs has been a major obstacle to their more widespread participation. Naturally, this is mediated by the fact that the programs themselves must be of interest.

C. The Scheduling of Inservice Programs

Eighty-five percent of the principals preferred that inservice programs be scheduled during the school year--only 7% preferred that programs be held during summer vacation. January, February, March, and April were identified as the months which would be most convenient for the principals to attend inservice programs. May, June, and especially December were cited as the least convenient times. Moreover, 80% of the respondents preferred that programs be held during the working day.

If these preferences are to be accommodated, the availability of release time becomes a crucial concern. In this regard, 79% of the principals estimated that they could obtain at least three days of released time per year which they could devote to their inservice education. This figure is in line with the gross amount of time they are willing to devote to inservice. That is, it may well be possible that if the principals

perceived that additional release time was available they may be willing to devote more time to their professional development. Indeed, 19 of the principals (33%) felt that the provision of release time was a factor which strongly affected their decision to attend an inservice program.

In addition to when a program is scheduled it is relevant to ascertain the preferred duration of the program. In general, an inservice program can take one of two forms: it may be intensive, involving only one gathering of the participants and lasting for one or more days, or it may be continuing, consisting of a series of gatherings meeting on a somewhat regularly scheduled basis. Seventy-five percent of the participants preferred intensive programs. Furthermore, 46% of the respondents indicated that an intensive program should last no longer than 2 days while another 43% felt it should last no longer than 3 to 5 days. On the other hand, if a program was offered on a continuing basis, 55% of the principals preferred that the meetings be held weekly.

D. Location of the Program Site

Intimately connected to the scheduling and duration of an inservice program is the selection of a site for holding the program. Since time is a valuable commodity to an educational administrator, travel time should be cut to a minimum--unless an additional traveling distance brings extra benefit to the program.

In this regard, 69% of the respondents preferred that an inservice program of three days duration be held within easy commuting distance and 71% considered a one-way distance of 50 miles to be within easy commuting

distance. However, 31% of the principals preferred that such a program be held in a distant city known for its tourist facilities. In fact, 18% indicated that an opportunity to travel was a factor which would strongly attract them to an inservice program, and another 52% felt it was a nice feature to have attached to a program.

Whether the program site is located near or far, 70% of the respondents felt that an attractive location was more than an inconsequential feature of an inservice program. The most frequently preferred site for housing a program was a nearby university (32%). This choice was followed by a nearby retreat facility (25%), a nearby convention facility (16%), a school within easy commuting distance (14%), and an attractive city at some distance (14%).

Thus, it appears that the wide majority of principals surveyed prefer that inservice programs be held locally; however, a smaller but substantial number of principals prefer that some travel be incorporated in the design of inservice programs.

E. Learning Activities

Although it is important to offer a program at a time and place which permit and attract the attendance of intended participants, an inservice program cannot be considered effective unless it maximizes learning. Therefore, the choice of instructional activities and the conditions which surround them is crucial. Learner preferences on these issues can assist in making these decisions.

Of the principals surveyed, 61% selected the discussion technique as

their most preferred mode of instruction; indeed, all but 3 principals (5%) either preferred or strongly preferred this option. Other instructional modes selected as being most preferred were site visitation (9%), internship experiences (9%), and the lecture technique (7%). Interestingly, 84% of the principals either preferred or strongly preferred site visitation as an instructional activity, while the corresponding figures for internship experiences and the lecture method were 54% and 64% respectively. Also, 71% of the respondents preferred or strongly preferred simulation techniques but only 6% selected this technique as their most preferred mode of instruction.

On the other hand, supervised reading was most frequently cited as being least preferred (35%), followed by role-playing (18%), and independent study (13%). Indeed, 38% of the principals indicated that they disliked being instructed through supervised readings, while 36% and 27% disliked role-playing and independent study. It is also interesting to note that 7% of the principals expressed dislike for the lecture method and 4% went so far as to claim it as their least preferred instructional mode.

Hence, the evidence quite clearly points to the discussion method as being the most preferred instructional mode for an instructional program. An examination of the above-cited preference patterns suggests that the sixty principals wish to take an active rather than a passive role in their own learning. With some degree of uncertainty, one could interpret the findings as indicating that although the principals

are willing to listen to lectures, they would prefer that the lecture serve as a supplement and/or stimulant to participant discussion which is seen as more productive.

In terms of promoting their own learning, 59% of the principals preferred that a lecture last no longer than one hour. Similarly, 45% of the principals felt that the maximum duration of a discussion session should be one hour. However, while another 40% preferred that discussion last longer than an hour, only 16% of the principals had similar feelings concerning a lecture. A group of 6 to 10 people was the most preferred size for a discussion group (36%), although strong support was also given to groups of 11 to 15 (33%), and 16 to 20 (24%). This preference for relatively small groupings was also exhibited in regard to the preferred number of program participants. Sixty-five percent of the principals stated that they would feel most comfortable and learn most effectively in an inservice program composed of between 10 and 25 participants. Sixteen percent desired a program involving fewer than 10 participants while 14% preferred programs with between 26 and 30 participants. Only 5% of the sixty principals opted for a program having more than 50 learners.

Finally, 69% of the principals felt that the above-mentioned instructional activities should be led by a school administrator. An additional 16% preferred that "in-house" directors of staff development should serve as the program's principal trainer while only 12% felt that this responsibility should be given to university professors.

F. The Topic of an Inservice Program

Of course, all of the above concerns and participant preferences are posited upon structuring an inservice program about a topic of interest. A skillful technique for determining the prospective participants' level of interest in various topics was devised by Frank Vicino and Carolyn Raymond of the Mesa School District in Arizona. This technique was incorporated as a section of the needs assessment questionnaire and appears in Appendix A under the title "Experience-Interest Inventory." The inventory ascertains not only the participants interest level in each topic, but also their degree of experience with each topic. The collection of this information enables one to calculate the difference between a participant's interest and experience which may be interpreted as a measure of the participant's need for additional training in that area. In addition, the inventory asks each participant to select the two topics about which they have the most interest in attending an inservice program. A useful by-product of the inventory is the identification of a human resource pool composed of prospective participants who claim expertise in certain topics and can later serve as facilitators at inservice programs dealing with their area(s) of competence.

Thus, the 47 topics selected for investigation in the pilot-study can be ranked on four different bases: (1) by general interest level, (2) by experience level, (3) by need (i.e., interest-experience), and (4) by their frequency of being named as the topic of most interest. The results of the pilot-study are tabulated in Appendix B. Each of the four bases exhibits a unique perspective relevant to selecting the particular topic

of an inservice program. For example, selection of the top-ranked item in listing #4 somewhat guarantees participation by highly motivated learners although they may be small in number; selection of the top-ranked item in listing #2 should produce more widespread participation but many learners may be only moderately motivated to learn; and, selection of the top-ranked item in listing #3 may well be most productive to the learners although it is possible that relatively few would be motivated to attend the program.

The final selection of a topic, therefore, depends upon the scope of the entire inservice package offered by its sponsor, the objectives and priorities of the program's sponsor, and the resources available to the program.

In brief, the most general interest was displayed by the principals toward "Evaluating the Instructional Staff." The principals had the most experience in dealing with the "Role of the State Education Agency," and least experience with "Computer-Assisted Instruction." The widest gap between interest level and experience was exhibited by "Competency-Based Curriculum Development." And, the topic most frequently cited by the principals as being of most interest was "Law and the School Administrator."

G. Reward and Motivation

In an attempt to reward participants and/or motivate their attendance, certain features may be incorporated into an inservice program. Rather than guessing as to what features prospective participants may value,

the issue should be addressed by the needs assessment.

When asked to select the most attractive of nine frequently employed features, the most frequently mentioned feature was the presence of a recognized scholar in the field (36%). Other features which were highly supported were "widespread participation by peers" (70%), and school district credit for pay purposes (15%). The least valued feature was a certificate of achievement. Perhaps suprisingly, "obtaining released time" and "university credit" received little support.

III. The Construction of a Model Inservice Program

In summary and conclusion, the preferences presented in the above section can be used to construct a "model" inservice program. Although, as mentioned, many other factors would demand consideration in a "real-life" situation, the following model is illustrative of the scope and specificity of the information provided by an expanded needs assessment survey.

Since the inservice program is intended to attract between 10 and 25 of the sixty principals, the program would center about "Evaluating the Instructional Staff." The program would be intensive, lasting for two days, and scheduled during a work-week in March. If possible, the program would be housed in a university situated within 50 miles of the participants. A recognized scholar in the field of faculty evaluation would be invited to deliver a one-hour lecture and participate in a 90 minute discussion session. The principal facilitators of the program, however, would be respected administrator/participants who had indicated both a

high degree of interest and expertise in the subject area. They would be asked to stimulate and lead discussion groups of approximately eight principals, depending on the total enrollment in the program. The lecture and discussion activities would be supplemented by a relatively brief work-session involving the simulation of a real-life situation. Every attempt would be made to allow provision of school district credit for pay purposes to the program participants.

As should be true of all inservice programs, the availability of the program would be announced months before it was held and frequently publicized in the interim. As soon as a principal enrolled in the program, he or she would be interviewed to more specifically determine his/her preferences for all aspects of the program. Where indicated, the program would be modified to account for these preferences.

Appendix B

Tabulated Results of the Experience-Interest Inventory

Topic	#1: Rank by General Interest Level	#2: Rank by Experience Level	#3: Rank by Need	#4: Rank by Frequency of Selection As Being of Most Interest
Admin. organization patterns	14	25	39	not cited
Affective education	27	33	28	30
Alcohol and drug education	36	28	47	18
Appreciation of the systems approach to educational management	37	43	10	30
Basic skills development programs	23	26	42	18
Career education	35	41	22	30
Collective negotiations and grievance procedures	28	39	12	3
Community education	38	37	37	30
Community involvement in educational decision-making	34	34	43	10.5
Conflict management	45	46	7	not cited
Competency-based curriculum dev.	33	45	1	18
Computer assisted instruction	47	47	3	30
Criterion referenced testing and student assessment	31	38	21	30
Curriculum renewal	8	35	6	10.5
Designing and conducting needs assessments	17	27	35	18
Developing effective communication patterns within the school	5	22	23	10.5
Developing school goals and objectives	4	23	15	10.5
Differentiated staffing	39	44	11	not cited
Due process and statutory rights in staff and student personnel admn.	12	29	17	18
Early childhood programs	40	40	32	13.5
Educational planning	13	31	16	not cited
Evaluating administrators and super.	19	32	29	18
Evaluating the instructional staff	1	6	36	2
Family life education (including sex education)	46	42	41	not cited
Human relations in administration	2	19	24	5
Law and the school administrator	16	8	38	1

<u>Topic</u>	<u>#1: Rank by General Interest Level</u>	<u>#2: Rank by Experience Level</u>	<u>#3: Rank by Need</u>	<u>#4: Rank by Frequency of Selection As Being of Most Interest</u>
Management information systems	3	14	30	not cited
Management by objectives (MBO)	9	2	46	18
Managing student behavior	6	20	13	7.5
Multi-cultural education	11	4	44	30
New methods of financing education	7	9	26	5
Open education	32	21	19	18
Organizational development	20	17	40	18
Organizing and conducting tax levy and bond issue campaigns	24	10	45	13.5
Planning and director support services (food, trans., maint., etc)	44	30	8	30
Planning and development affirmative action programs	25	24	2	18
Politics of education	43	36	4	30
Program evaluation	10	18	25	30
Program, Planning, Budgeting, Evaluating Systems (PPBS)	29	7	5	18
Role of the state education agency	21	1	34	not cited
School-community relations programs	42	13	31	30
School desegregation	26	3	20	not cited
Special education	18	15	9	30
Staff development	22	16	18	7.5
Staff selection and termination	30	12	33	5
Strike management	15	5	14	not cited
Time management (effective time utilization)	41	11	27	30